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Industry as a Service

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THE idea of rendering public service by labor may be said to be now in its third stage of development. In the broader sense all useful productive work is and, of course, always has been a social service.

In the earlier period of man's existence, there was very little of co-operative effort. Such as there was, was confined to members of a family, confronted with the task of maintaining themselves by direct application of brawn and such brain power as they possessed to the materials of nature, which were then everywhere free for such application. These materials of nature were, of course, available only within the limited area that could be reached by travel on foot, and by transportation by the power of human muscles.

Probably there was little or no thought among these primitive people that their labor was in any sense a public service. What labor they did was performed under the stimulus of hunger, thirst, the unkind or annoying aspects of the elements, and the instinctive desire for the perpetuation of the race.

They had no thought that any of these impulses or the acts growing out of them were especially creditable to themselves or of service to others. There was no "public," in the modern sense, to be served. Yet we, with the history of the race before us and with our much broader outlook, may perceive readily enough that by simply following the primitive impulses of their primitive nature, they were after all rendering a service without which no society or organ-

ized public could have been developed.

In a later period, when the development of unusual skill in the making of implements of utility and of warfare, and the specialization and the exchange of such implements by their makers for the products of the chase had resulted in the beginnings of commerce, there must have followed the first conception of labor as a public service, and the maker of the best spear or sling, bow and arrow or trap, came to be recognized as rendering a special service to the tribe—service of a kind not otherwise obtainable and comparable at least with the service rendered by the most doughty wielder of these primitive weapons and appliances. This was the more clearly perceived and appreciated because the makers and the users came into direct contact and discussed defects and failures, their causes and possible remedies.

If a superior war club contributed to an important victory over an enemy, the wielder of the club knew its maker; all the other members of the tribe knew him and it was practically impossible for him not to receive credit for his superior skill and his full share of public honor. In fact, it is not unlikely that the development of specialized skill or ability by individuals was one of the most powerful incentives to the formation of tribes or groups of people, having common interests of a fundamental character which could be best promoted by group action and by making available for all members of the group products of the special skill attained by various individuals.

OBSCURING THE IDEA OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Though this primitive industry, developed through many ages, resulted in many and important improvements to the race, the direct contact of maker and user continued to be the rule until by the introduction of merchandizing and common mediums of exchange, men who neither made nor used weapons or implements came to play an important part in their distribution for use. Such men had, from the first, a pecuniary incentive to prevent their patrons from knowing, or coming into contact with, the makers of their wares, fearing that such contact would result in more or less direct trading and loss of business for themselves. Survivals of this idea are to be seen in present day merchandizing, especially in such things as groceries, drugs, millinery, etc. Many of the largest retail enterprises handle goods either not marked by the name of any maker or else marked with their own name as maker, although they have nothing to do with the real manufacture of the goods but have them made under contract.

Further than that, by the growth of very large industrial establishments, especially those belonging to corporations, in which the name of the corporation is given the greatest possible publicity and the individuals connected with it often systematically kept in anonymous obscurity, the makers, who are the real servitors of the public, are unknown to that public as such. In the lower grades of employment, even the names of many of the men who work are unknown, and they are distinguished one from another only by numbers assigned to them.

Men in such employment can not be expected to realize that they are rendering a public service. They

know only that they must serve a boss whom they too often fear; too often, also, with good reason. To succeed in pleasing the boss sufficiently to hold their jobs is all that concerns them, and it is to him only that they are conscious of rendering service.

In some higher planes of employment familiar results of the attitude thus developed are seen in the behavior of ticket sellers, ticket punchers at train gates, trainmen and "public service" employees in general who, in one way or another, come in contact with the public. They often come to think that they render service to only one man, that man being their immediate superior, who has the power of discharge and whom they, therefore, know that they must treat with all possible consideration and respect. Subconsciously, they think of him as being the source of their means of support, and seem not to recognize in the least that their real source of support is the public to whom they are disagreeable in various ways.

Happily there have been of late, many indications that such workers and those who direct them are being taught that it is the public which supports the enterprises in which they are engaged; that it is, after all, this public for whom the service is maintained and that it pays to recognize this fact and to behave accordingly.

The obscuring of the idea of service to the public is shown sometimes by the rules made by or under the influence of accountants or controllers, who come into contact with the public little, if at all, and whose only concern is to see to it that the system which they have adopted to prevent irregularity is rigidly enforced. Under such a system, an elevated railroad "tied up" by a fire may not allow its ticket seller to return the money just collected from the passengers so that they may seek other means of trans-

portation, but he must tediously fill out numbered blanks, sign them, tear them from a book and give them to the passengers, already exasperated by delay and inconvenience, who can use these blanks only in payment of fares at some other time. Meantime, if it should happen that a tired mother had spent her last remaining change in tickets for herself and children, she may walk to her destination, or otherwise do as best she can. It is obvious that this policy is pursued only for the convenience of the accounting department. The immediate cause arises from a too narrow view of the nature of the industry although the primary cause is to be found in the modern development of our complicated and indirect methods of rendering service and not, as we are often tempted to believe, in the sheer perversity of human nature.

BALKING THE CREATIVE DESIRE

Perhaps the earlier experience of the race in which each worker was able to see and to understand the nature of the service rendered by him and to know that it was appreciated at its full value, has implanted in our natures that trait which makes it irksome to work hard for long hours daily, performing over and over again a simple operation upon a single part of a complicated machine, knowing only dimly the nature of the work performed by the machine, and nothing at all of the function of the piece upon which we continuously perform our monotonous labor. Whatever the cause, we know that the enthusiasm and the intense devotion of the boy in the construction of a boat, a windmill, a wagon or wireless apparatus, almost certainly disappears entirely when he afterwards enters a factory and becomes "a hand," making, or partly making, only a small part of a machine, in which he is inspired to take

no interest whatever, being often forbidden by factory rules to enter any department of the factory except the one in which he works.

While our personal needs or those of our dependents still remain for most of us the primary incentive to work, it is becoming clearer daily to those who conduct our industries, that our past methods have violated an ingrained trait of human nature—the desire to accomplish something which we know to be worth while; something which others can and do appreciate as a real service to them.

It is gratifying to know that many sincere efforts are being made to develop in our modern workers a clearer perception of the fact that all useful work, mental or manual, is a public service and a genuine contribution to the advancement of the race; that it is the right of the worker to feel the full force of this fact, and to get from his work some degree of that satisfaction and inspiration which comes from the gratification of the creative instinct that we find in the child who makes, entirely with his own hands, a thing that is useful or beautiful or capable of giving pleasure to himself and to others.

THE DESIRE TO RENDER SERVICE

During the late war, there were many instances of both skilled and unskilled workers leaving private employment to work in government arsenals, because they could more clearly perceive that their work in these arsenals was a direct public service—a personal contribution to the winning of what they regarded as being, more than any other, a people's war. In some cases, they came from establishments in which they had been working on government contracts, but they preferred to work directly for the government and under the direction of men who were also working directly for the

government and without the intervention of those whom they regarded as mere "profiteers."

One result of this feeling has been that very many of these men who were criticized for getting the highest wages while their brothers were at the front serving their country for far less, now believe that in a future war, if it should come, not only soldiers but absolutely everybody able to contribute in any way to the winning of the war should be conscripted, supplied with what they need for maintenance and nothing more, and that there should be no profit-making by anybody as a result of war. An idea which, whatever else we may think of it, is based upon a profound belief that industry should, in times of national peril, be made exclusively a public service.

It is true enough that many of those classed among "the workers" have erroneous ideas concerning what constitutes public service, and are too apt to believe that those who do not literally earn their bread by the sweat of their brow are not obeying the divine command but are supported by those who perform manual labor. On the other hand, among the brain workers themselves, there is too general a belief that anyone who can make a living, or even a fortune, while keeping within the law, or conforming to an established custom, is necessarily rendering a public service. The real facts as to whether or not he is actually rendering such service, are not examined.

The grosser forms of obtaining a share of the world's goods without contributing to them are deprecated or condemned by all of us; but there is a considerable territory within which efforts to obtain wealth without rendering any useful service whatever are condoned, and sometimes even highly esteemed. The most important of these, both by reason of its

magnitude and by its effects upon our social organization and manner of life, is the system by which one member of the human family is permitted to take from others a large share of what they earn, for his permission to use that portion of the earth or its raw materials which they need for homes, or for places in which to carry on useful work. The most superficial examination will show clearly enough that he who holds title to land on which he has made no improvements and intends to make none, but only charges others for the privilege of making them, is rendering no service to the public. It behooves us to recognize that all such things are being more and more scrutinized by that part of the public whose difficulty in obtaining a good living stimulates them to direct clear thought along these lines.

We all need to recognize more clearly that, not only is all useful work always and everywhere a public service, but that the time may come, and sooner than we might expect, when the test of the social desirability of any activity will be: Does it render a public service? Our modern industrial methods have obscured too much the fundamental facts underlying these matters, and we have departed too far from the ancient condition when all the members of a tribe or human group fared well or ill together, each being honored in accordance with his contribution to the general well being, whether by the chase, in the common defense or in socially beneficent industry.

When we have done away with the means by which some of us prosper without rendering any useful service, then we must so arrange that an honest and useful worker will not be despised, but will be enabled to understand that his work is appreciated as a service and will be rewarded in proportion to its value.